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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS  
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Forty-fourth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 482nd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,  
on Monday, 4 October 1993, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. BODDENS-HOSANG (Netherlands)

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General debate (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued) (A/AC.96/813, 814 and 815)

1. Ms. WENSLEY (Australia) said that, each year, the Executive Committee's session provided an opportunity to review the operations of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees during the past 12 months, to survey current and prospective world refugee needs, to establish parameters for fund-raising and expenditure and to provide the High Commissioner with advice on priorities and strategies for action. She thanked Mrs. Ogata for the comprehensive report she had submitted to the Executive Committee at its 481st meeting and expressed her appreciation of the exceptional leadership qualities the High Commissioner had shown during the past three years. She also thanked the former Deputy High Commissioner, Mr. Stafford, whose commitment and energy would never be forgotten. She was pleased that Mr. Walzer had agreed to assume that function on a temporary basis until a permanent replacement could be appointed.

2. She paid a tribute to the UNHCR staff members who had lost their lives in the cause of humanitarian relief. Australia extended its deepest sympathy to their families and condemned once again all attacks or threats against persons involved in humanitarian protection or relief activities. No effort should be spared to ensure their protection.

3. In her overview of UNHCR activities for 1992-1993 (A/AC.96/813), the High Commissioner described an unprecedented number of new, concurrent refugee emergencies around the globe. Her Office also continued to seek durable solutions for long-standing problems. The Australian delegation noted in particular that progress had been made in the implementation of each of the components of the High Commissioner's strategic plan for UNHCR, namely, the capacity for emergency response, preventive protection and voluntary repatriation.

4. Three areas of activity deserved special mention for the results achieved. First, more than 360,000 Cambodians had returned to their country and participated in United Nations supported national elections, thereby playing a role in the reconstruction of Cambodia. The unprecedented success of that complex operation had been achieved through effective planning, broad-based international support and commitment and trust on the part of the majority of the Cambodian people. Secondly, the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees (CPA) had resulted in a dramatic decrease in the number of asylum-seekers from that part of the world. In that instance as well, international consultation and cooperation had created the conditions necessary for the success of the Plan. The third area deserving particular mention was the former Yugoslavia. In that case, UNHCR was endeavouring, in particularly difficult circumstances, to attain the objectives of prevention and protection largely through the maintenance of emergency supply lines. The fact that the political process had not succeeded so far in resolving that terrible conflict did not in any way minimize UNHCR's achievement. The looming tragedy of another winter would place even more pressure on the High Commissioner and her Office.

5. Australia unreservedly supported the comprehensive approach UNHCR had adopted towards humanitarian crises, but stressed the need to maintain at all times a clear sense of priorities. In its opinion, three areas merited careful attention. The first was the need for UNHCR to maintain effective financial and administrative systems and structures to manage a level of expenditure which consistently exceeded \$1 billion. Her delegation advocated ongoing efforts to ensure increased transparency, greater accountability and timeliness of reporting.
6. The second priority involved the concept of prevention with its strong emphasis on solutions close to the source of crisis situations which threatened population displacement. It would be necessary to indicate more clearly the linkages or differences between prevention and related concepts such as humanitarian relief, peacemaking and peace-keeping. In that regard, she drew attention to the study recently submitted to the General Assembly by the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, entitled "Cooperating for peace", which offered practical suggestions for the development of preventive strategies. Clearly, no single agency was capable of dealing by itself with that vast programme of action and it was therefore of crucial importance to establish clear markers for UNHCR's areas of activity and competence and to enhance coordination with other United Nations agencies. The High Commissioner had given some important examples in that regard at the Executive Committee's preceding meeting. In that connection, Australia attached particular importance to a closer partnership between UNHCR and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs.
7. The third area requiring attention related to UNHCR's traditional mandate of protection. While supporting the application of solutions at or close to the source of humanitarian crises, Australia considered that that in no way negated the right to seek and to enjoy asylum.
8. Mass and irregular migration movements would no doubt be one of the great issues at the end of the current century and the beginning of the next century. While those movements were based largely on social and economic factors, they were also exploited by extensive people-smuggling networks. The phenomenon of mass and irregular migration was made more difficult for Governments to deal with because of its frequently close association with refugee movements. That was a development which threatened the institution of asylum itself and would in the end be to the detriment of genuine refugees. To cope with that situation, UNHCR called on Governments to adopt rapid and equitable procedures for determining the status of refugees and to provide procedures for independent review in the case of a negative decision. Australia had taken account of those two suggestions, but considered that the adoption of a multilateral approach would assume increasing importance. Its view was that a comprehensive burden-sharing approach should be adopted and that a greater number of countries should propose asylum places to those in need, wherever that might be in the world, rather than simply maintaining domestic asylum systems for those best able to reach them. That would lighten the burden for countries of first asylum.
9. At the 481st meeting of the Executive Committee, the representative of Thailand had referred to UNHCR as a vital organization. UNHCR was vital in every sense of the word: it needed vitality in order to continue to respond

to the demands placed on it. Its effectiveness was vital to the United Nations, which was struggling to cope with an explosion, as the High Commissioner had said, of humanitarian emergencies. UNHCR was vital to Governments, which were turning increasingly to it as an organization capable of responding promptly with pragmatism and compassion to urgent demands. It was vital to NGOs, which sought an ever closer partnership between Governments and communities. Lastly, it was vital to the refugees and displaced persons it had been created to serve.

10. The High Commissioner could continue to function only with the increased cooperation and support of the international community. Australia, for its part, would do everything in its power to provide that support and to secure that cooperation.

11. Mr. HALLERBY (Sweden), referring to an article entitled "Who defends the United Nations?" published the previous week in a Swedish paper, said that he wished to focus on the challenges to the United Nations system as a whole and its implications for UNHCR. Indeed, demand for the Office to be present around the world had increased steadily and operations were becoming more and more complex and difficult to carry out. Of course, the United Nations and its many programmes and specialized agencies were doing impressive work in difficult conditions. However, fundamental reforms were essential to promote coordination and efficiency.

12. There was a great risk that emergency response and humanitarian programmes would make States forget that humanitarian assistance could only be complementary to political initiatives that sought to address the root causes. Humanitarian efforts must always be guided exclusively by humanitarian needs: partisan political objectives should never be allowed to interfere with the impartiality of humanitarian assistance. The High Commissioner had met the highest expectations and was therefore to be commended. However, it was important, after such a rapid expansion, to pay attention to questions such as the streamlining of UNHCR and the development of management skills.

13. Situations involving internal displacement accounted for an increasing part of the world's forced movements of people. It was not easy to distinguish between refugees, internally displaced persons and the local population in areas of conflict or return. To treat people differently who suffered in the same circumstances would be morally questionable. His country shared the views expressed in the Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/815), but would like to go one step further in defining responsibilities. First, the State was responsible for the protection of the basic human rights of its population. Secondly, the United Nations as a whole - and not only the High Commissioner - had a responsibility to manage the problems created by the movements of people. Thirdly, the international community had a responsibility to find the necessary financial means.

14. To deal with the problem of internal displacement, the first step would be to establish a focal point in the United Nations system for information on displaced persons. That had been suggested by Sweden in the Commission on Human Rights in February 1993 and again by the European Communities at the

summer session of the Economic and Social Council. The Executive Committee should encourage the High Commissioner to study the cost of establishing such a service.

15. Questions of protection in situations of conflict and UNHCR's presence in the country of origin could not be separated from the problem of internal displacement. His delegation therefore welcomed the highly flexible and pragmatic approach adopted in the Note on International Protection. Protection and humanitarian assistance were two sides of the same coin. Humanitarian assistance, so useful to curb the most serious human rights violations, must be combined with efforts aimed at resolving the underlying conflicts.

16. The Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters should review the budgetary and programmatic implications of a limited UNHCR response to internal displacement and to the consequences for UNHCR and its staff when they worked in conflict areas. The Executive Committee might recommend that those issues should be raised at an inter-sessional meeting of the Sub-Committee.

17. His delegation saw a need at the present time to coordinate the policies and activities of development assistance programmes and of migration. It was essential to develop the necessary instruments for integrated solutions, including prevention, promotion of economic progress, democracy and human rights. It was also necessary to deal with the results of forced migration and massive refugee outflows. New thinking was necessary: conservatism was no longer appropriate.

18. Voluntary repatriation was, if sustainable, the best solution to any refugee problem. Peace and confidence-building measures were the basis for durable solutions. However, they must be combined with humanitarian and development assistance activities so that the returnees would really have a chance to start a new life. The International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) was an example of a regional inter-agency approach that had proved to be successful. That type of experience should be developed. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee had a particular responsibility in that regard. Sweden stressed that the conclusions which had been the subject of an agreement in the Economic and Social Council in the summer of 1993 had underlined the importance of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on Emergencies. All United Nations bodies concerned should do their utmost to ensure that that Committee was an effective structure for inter-agency coordination and programming.

19. When a refugee situation occurred, the initial solution should be regional. The basic principle must be protection in the region, assistance to the refugees and the host countries and return when the cause of their flight had ceased to exist. That principle must be upheld. In the interest of the refugees, irregular migration from countries in the region where protection was already secured should as far as possible be curbed. Such movements overloaded asylum procedures and constituted a threat to the very institution of asylum. Resettlement should be used only in emergencies and special cases where no other solution was possible. It would then take the form of a temporary stay or permanent residence according to the national legislation of

the resettlement countries. The High Commissioner's requirements for the resettlement of refugees varied and resources must therefore be used in a more flexible manner. Earmarked resources for the standing quota of programmes of some countries, such as Sweden, could be used in cooperation with UNHCR to finance resettlement in those countries or for other needs. It was also of the utmost importance that all countries which had the means to do so should agree on a commitment to participate in emergency resettlement operations and that they should provide support, financially or otherwise, for the countries receiving massive refugee populations.

20. Sweden was one of the largest donors to UNHCR in general and to the UNHCR programme for the former Yugoslavia in particular. It had received a large proportion of refugees from that country. It would certainly continue to assume its share of responsibilities, but it was important for all countries to do the same. Furthermore, the magnitude of the conflict which had torn apart a European country demonstrated Europe's lack of preparedness and incapacity to act when conflicts arose in its own continent. New mechanisms to complement the 1951 Convention therefore had to be developed. A fair burden-sharing system must be an integral part of such mechanisms. With regard to the political framework of such initiatives, Sweden believed that the structure of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) would be the most suitable.

21. The world needed a strong UNHCR within a strong United Nations, characterized by flexibility, efficiency and professional management. That was the United Nations which Sweden would like to defend.

22. Mr. MOSAASE (Lesotho) said that, in March 1993, Lesotho had peacefully changed from a military Government to a civilian multi-party democracy. While it was true that only one party was represented in Parliament, that should not be a source of concern, since the Government had committed itself to a free press, the opposition parties were invited to the Senate and the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights ensured that democracy was well protected.

23. His delegation was fully aware of the heavy task awaiting UNHCR. Singularly and collectively, all States had a responsibility towards the victims of war and famine throughout the world. Some progress had been achieved in some areas where the conflicts had been peacefully resolved. Regrettably, there were still some parts of the world where concerted efforts were needed to alleviate the suffering of the victims. Of course, budgetary constraints would inevitably limit UNHCR's activities. However, it was to be hoped that member countries would contribute generously according to their commitments and capabilities to allow the smooth operation of integration and resettlement programmes.

24. Lesotho had for many years enjoyed a fruitful association and cooperation with UNHCR. The situation had eased, but ominous clouds still hovered over the horizon as South Africa entered the last stages of the dismantling of apartheid. It was recognized that freedom would not automatically lead to peace and economic progress. Continuing inter-ethnic fighting and murders dampened any hopes of seeing South African refugees return quickly to their country; in fact, their number in Lesotho had tripled.

25. The Government of Lesotho would honour its international commitments, in particular those relating to refugees and human rights. It would always stand ready to receive bona fide refugees fleeing from the scourge of political persecution and massacres. It would always endeavour to practise a liberal policy of full integration of refugees into the mainstream of its social fabric. In that regard, it had such instruments as the Refugees Act of 1983 and the refugee regulations of 1986, as well as other texts containing the relevant international instruments.

26. At the forty-third session of the Executive Committee, he had made a plea for peace, reconciliation and the promotion of economic development. That was the common desire of all peoples and those in southern Africa had at the present time some hope of seeing it achieved. In South Africa, the negotiations were continuing and general elections were scheduled for 27 April 1994. Lesotho had also noted with satisfaction that an agreement had been concluded between the South African Republic and UNHCR which should, inter alia, make it possible to begin the repatriation of Mozambican refugees once a tripartite agreement had been signed by UNHCR, the Republic of South Africa and Mozambique.

27. The situation was still volatile in the southern region of Africa. Since July 1993, Lesotho had received people from South Africa seeking protection only seven months before the proposed elections of 27 April 1994. Faced with that influx of South African refugees, Lesotho hoped that it would be able to continue to rely on UNHCR's assistance.

28. The new Lesotho Government would play its role bilaterally and internationally in order to settle international disputes peacefully and cooperate in the social and economic improvement of peoples so that there would be no more political and economic refugees.

29. Mr. VAN WULFFTEN PALTHE (Netherlands) said that, further to the statement made on behalf of the Community and its member States by the representative of Belgium at the preceding meeting, his delegation wished to share with the members of the Executive Committee and observers its views on improving the response by the United Nations system to the urgent needs of the internally displaced.

30. While the collapse of the Berlin Wall, which had symbolized the end of the cold war, had offered the prospect of enduring peace in the world, that event had soon been followed by disintegration, ethnic strife and armed conflict resulting in mass movements of people in Europe, as well as in Africa and Asia. Faced with that situation, the international community should organize itself in such a way as to be able to deal with the new challenges. That applied not only to States, but also and even more importantly, to international organizations such as the United Nations, which was relied upon to cope with crisis situations in the world.

31. UNHCR provided protection to the persons to whom the 1951 Convention applied and that protection had proved adequate in the past. However, at the present time, more people were uprooted who did not fall under the 1951 Convention than those who did and official figures concerning refugees and internally displaced persons reflected only a portion of the actual number of

victims of war and civil and ethnic strife. The United Nations system had not formally assigned any general responsibility with regard to the protection of persons in refugee-like situations, i.e. internally displaced persons and those under siege. Of course, UNHCR had, on an ad hoc basis and at the request of the Secretary-General, been involved repeatedly in the protection of internally displaced persons on the basis of its experience with refugees in comparable situations. As a result of that case-by-case approach, those persons had no agency comparable to UNHCR to turn to when they were forced to flee their homes. That shortcoming had occupied the attention of United Nations operational agencies, ICRC and the NGO community, as well as others within the system, for almost a decade. On the threshold of the twenty-first century, it was not possible to leave unsolved a problem whose importance, reflected in the documents before the Executive Committee, had been recognized by the Commission on Human Rights and the World Conference on Human Rights.

32. It would therefore be necessary for the international community to provide the United Nations with the structural basis to enable it to protect people in refugee-like situations. The time had come to proceed from the current ad hoc arrangement within the United Nations system to the assignment of general competence to UNHCR to provide protection to internally disabled persons and local populations under siege in refugee-like and potential refugee-generating situations. The Executive Committee might therefore deem it appropriate to recommend that the General Assembly should authorize UNHCR, in certain conditions and in the light of the means at its disposal, to ensure the protection of those categories of persons. In that connection, he supported the request just made by the representative of Sweden.

33. In conclusion, he made it clear that he was not advocating that UNHCR should duplicate the work of organizations such as ICRC or non-governmental organizations. He was simply drawing attention to the need for a more structural arrangement within the United Nations. Furthermore, UNHCR should not necessarily be the only organization to provide material assistance to internally displaced persons. The concept of assigning lead agencies, which often involved complex coordination, had proved to be a satisfactory way of dealing with that problem and, while UNHCR had frequently been called upon to perform that function, UNICEF or WFP had proved to be equally effective. The assignment of the lead agency was decided on a case-by-case basis at the present time and account was taken of which organization was best placed in a certain situation to assume that function.

34. Lastly, he said that his delegation had submitted a draft conclusion on internally displaced persons to the secretariat and would welcome any comments on that text.

35. Mr. MUSA (Nigeria) said that, more than 40 years after the adoption of the 1951 Convention, the status of refugees continued to deteriorate and become more complex. The causes of massive displacements and exoduses which resulted in refugee problems were only too well known: geopolitical, ethnic, religious or economic conflicts, natural and man-made catastrophes and human rights violations, to mention only a few. However, the main factors were related to economic problems and human rights violations. The debt burden and

the conditionalities imposed by the Bretton Woods institutions had not only created political instability in many developing countries, but had also aggravated crises on an unprecedented scale.

36. If UNHCR, which was a member of the international community, did not seriously deal with the problem of abject poverty and underdevelopment and did not institutionalize the promotion and enjoyment of human rights, its search for durable solutions to the refugee problem would be futile. With the emergence of a new world order, it was clear that crises and problems were becoming universal and should be seen as such.

37. The pressures on international, regional and subregional organizations in general and on the United Nations in particular were substantial and, in the absence of ensured funding, created specific difficulties. However, there was widespread recognition that a system of global governance was no longer an option, but a necessity.

38. The rapidly growing upsurge of conflicts and ethnic and religious intolerance over the past year, since the most recent session of the Executive Committee, had put the international community to a serious test of its ability to provide adequate humanitarian response. That kind of assistance should be accompanied by development aid and, to that end, the building and strengthening of local institutions should be among the priorities of the United Nations.

39. His delegation appreciated the efforts which UNHCR was making to ensure that refugees enjoyed international protection. That initiative should also involve the application of laws and humanitarian principles to secure and promote the rights, security and welfare of refugees. Many victims did not enjoy international protection because of the inadequacy of the current definition of refugee. The international community should recognize that inadequacy and endeavour to expand the legal responsibility of States with regard to the protection of all refugees.

40. His delegation was also concerned about the diversity of the definitions and interpretations being given to the concept of non-refoulement and considered it important to have a uniform standard definition of the principle of refoulement or non-refoulement. Furthermore, asylum-seekers should not be returned to a third country unless the returning country had first sought assurances that, in the third country, the asylum-seeker would be granted effective and durable protection. In that connection, he called for the conclusion of an international agreement on minimum procedural standards for considering asylum requests. Furthermore, his delegation appealed to all States to ensure that they did not fall below international standards when taking decisions on refugee definitions and legislation.

41. Contrary to the hopes that had arisen following the end of the cold war, the refugee population had been growing steadily, while the means for their maintenance were inadequate. The economic crisis in nearly every country had had an adverse effect on contributions to UNHCR. If that trend continued, UNHCR's financial situation could become dramatic. His delegation was particularly impressed with the prudent manner in which the High Commissioner had been handling the limited resources available, especially in view of the

extension of UNHCR's activities in the areas of large-scale relief programmes for refugees, massive repatriation and resettlement. In that regard, UNHCR's financial situation deserved serious attention, as shown in the report of the High Commissioner. The increase in the number of refugees required a corresponding increase in the resources allocated to UNHCR. Nigeria commended the donor countries, renewed its appeal for the latter to increase their financial contributions and called on the United Nations system to make more funds available for refugee matters.

42. His country wished to remind the Executive Committee of the problem of internally displaced persons. Although that question did not come within UNHCR's mandate, the Office should take note of the activities of the United Nations bodies concerned with human rights, in particular those of the Commission on Human Rights.

43. Mr. TABESH (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that he was deeply grateful to the High Commissioner for Refugees for the remarkable introductory statement which she had made at the preceding meeting and which reflected a clear indication of her insight into the Afghan refugee situation in Iran. He hoped that her appeal would encourage the international community to provide the necessary financial and moral support. As the first refugee host country in the world, the Islamic Republic of Iran unreservedly supported UNHCR's humanitarian activities, since it believed that UNHCR could become an effective instrument for assisting victims and eventually establishing peace and security only if it enjoyed the extensive support of States.

44. The number of refugees and the dimensions of refugee problems were making the situation increasingly complex and multifaceted. Almost without exception, refugees were appearing with every political, social and economic crisis in the world. Consequently, the refugee problem could no longer be addressed by a simple humanitarian approach which traditionally neglected the underlying root causes that were to be found at the present time in breaches of human rights, ethnic cleansing, xenophobia, the economic and social situation, natural or man-made disasters and the lack of basic socio-economic infrastructures in countries of origin.

45. On the other hand, the nature of the problem had changed dramatically since the Second World War and the world was increasingly faced with situations that were completely different from those prevailing in the 1950s. As a result of those changes, millions of desperate persons might threaten peace and security in various parts of the world because, as human beings, they wished to live in dignity. A proper solution to their problem should be based on a comprehensive approach encompassing preventive measures and refugee aid with due attention to developmental elements. In that regard, he stressed once again that assisting broad-based economic growth and social development was the key to avoiding new refugee movements. That principle, which had been recognized in various General Assembly and Executive Committee resolutions, had never been seriously implemented.

46. As the barriers of the cold war crumbled, new walls and fortifications had been built up to prevent refugee access to the developed world. In that regard, it was very unfortunate that the majority of the initial parties to the 1951 Convention, which were developed countries, prevented asylum-seekers

from crossing their borders or postponed consideration of asylum requests. The developed countries were mistaken in assuming that walls and obstacles could prevent or even restrict refugee inflows. As long as the root causes were not properly addressed, the problem could only worsen. Far from wishing to expand the mandate of UNHCR, to redefine the concept of refugee or to question the validity of the 1951 Convention, his country proposed a new approach to the refugee problem, taking account of the new international realities and using existing international instruments. In that connection, the drafters of the 1951 Convention had provided it with the dynamism and flexibility it needed to remain valid in an ever-changing world.

47. Referring to developments in the refugee situation in his country, he said that, despite the repatriation of more than 1 million Afghan and Iraqi refugees, the Islamic Republic of Iran still hosted more than 2,600,000 refugees. As international assistance for those refugees continued to be minimal and out of proportion to their number, his country had had to use its own national resources. That had always been a great burden, particularly during the reconstruction period after the war and as a result of the many natural disasters it had to cope with each year.

48. The large-scale operation involving the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees had continued to be his country's most preoccupying task during the past year. The spontaneous repatriation movement that had begun in early 1992 had, since December 1992, come under a programme implemented by a tripartite commission composed of representatives of the Governments of Afghanistan and of the Islamic Republic of Iran and UNHCR, in collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Under that programme, all Afghan refugees wishing to return to their country were offered free transportation facilities by IOM up to the border, where they received a UNHCR/WFP assistance package before departure. The latest statistics report indicated that, by the end of September 1993, nearly 800,000 Afghan refugees had regained their country voluntarily and that only 300,000 had received a package. He stressed the need for UNHCR and WFP to continue providing assistance to the remaining Afghan refugees, estimated to number about 1,919,000, under their regular programmes. At the request of the Afghan Government, the Iranian Government had extended numerous facilities to those refugees. In addition, it had launched a registration programme in August 1993 under which nearly 200,000 Afghan refugees had been able to be registered.

49. It was his country's policy to encourage, through material incentives, the voluntary, dignified and safe repatriation of Afghan refugees, with a view to ensuring a return to peace and a normal socio-economic life in the country. The increase in assistance, while necessary and useful in the short term, might not be conducive to the restoration of normal life in the long term. It should be emphasized that the underdevelopment of socio-economic infrastructures in Afghanistan was the major obstacle in that regard, as Mrs. Ogata herself had recently noted. Repatriation to Afghanistan must be planned in both countries in a comprehensive and coordinated manner and the efforts of the United Nations system and NGOs designed to reconstruct Afghanistan should be oriented towards repatriation, as well as towards development.

50. The Iraqi Kurd and Arab refugees who had sought refuge in the Islamic Republic of Iran in the 1980s constituted the second largest refugee group in his country. Since the preceding session of the Executive Committee, nearly 286,300 refugees had gradually been repatriated voluntarily. At the present time, about 695,000 remained in his country; to that figure should be added 4,700 Iraqi refugees who had entered the country following the opening of the southern borders. UNHCR had recently taken measures to resettle the refugees in safer and better-equipped camps in the centre of the country. During the summer of 1993, nearly 30,000 Iraqi refugees had requested his Government's assistance in order to be able to return to their country.

51. Following the conflicts between Azerbaijan and Armenia, which had led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Azeris, the Islamic Republic of Iran, out of a desire to provide humanitarian assistance and at the request of the Republic of Azerbaijan, had decided to establish a camp with a capacity of 100,000 persons in Imshili district. The initial groundwork had been done and the settlement facilities should be completed before the beginning of winter. In that regard, his country was prepared to do its utmost to facilitate the transit of international assistance for the Azeris before the situation turned into another emergency. It also reaffirmed its view that stockpiling of emergency assistance items in the region was a dire necessity and that such a procedure was the only way to ensure a speedy, effective and timely reaction by the United Nations system to emergency situations.

52. Mrs. GREEN (Observer for Mexico) recalled that the Concerted Plan of Action of the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) had been adopted in May 1989 by the Central American countries, Belize and Mexico in an attempt to provide durable solutions to the problems of refugees in the region. The CIREFCA Follow-up Committee, composed of the representatives of the seven member countries, was supported by United Nations bodies, in particular the High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme. The results of the implementation of the plan, carried out by the Committee, had been largely positive, as had been noted by all the countries which had provided political and financial support for the efforts made by the States concerned to encourage voluntary repatriation, to reduce considerably the number of refugees in the region and to help the repatriated people to be reintegrated in the institutional and economic life of their countries of origin. In that regard, a tribute should be paid to all the countries which had shown so much generosity and made it possible, between May 1989 and January 1993, to mobilize nearly \$250 million in favour of Central American refugees.

53. As the CIREFCA Concerted Plan of Action was to end in May 1994, its implementation could already be evaluated. In the first place, all those concerned, including the countries affected, cooperating Governments, non-governmental organizations, the populations involved and United Nations agencies, had constantly tried to reach a consensus in adopting solutions for the restoration and consolidation of peace, as well as for the development of the region. The CIREFCA Follow-up Committee had thus regularly held meetings of representatives of the Governments of the seven member countries, who had exchanged views, shared their experiences and reached a consensus in seeking solutions to problems that went beyond political borders. Close coordination had also been established with non-governmental organizations, which played a

major role in support for development and whose activities had had largely beneficial effects on displaced persons. Moreover, ties between affected countries, members of the international community and the United Nations system had been strengthened, support groups had made it possible to maintain a constant exchange of information between the countries involved and the cooperating countries on developments in the situation and inter-agency coordination between UNHCR and UNDP had been extremely positive.

54. There was no doubt that CIREFCA had contributed to the promotion of respect for the fundamental rights of the displaced persons, both in the host countries and in the countries of origin, and to the promotion of international humanitarian law, as demonstrated by the increase in the number of countries that had ratified the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. Furthermore, efforts had been made to find durable solutions to refugee problems, particularly through the promulgation of internal legislation facilitating the reintegration of repatriated or displaced persons in various countries of the region.

55. All the countries affected in Central America had demonstrated the necessary political will to seek firm and durable solutions to the extremely complex problems caused by armed conflicts and population displacement and, for its part, the CIREFCA Follow-up Committee had tried, as the restoration of peace was proceeding, to assist all the populations affected by the conflict, without any discrimination whatever. The member countries of the Committee were aware that peace and development were inseparable and had adopted strategies and programmes designed to consolidate peace and encourage development, while protecting the environment. Quick impact projects had therefore been undertaken in the majority of countries in the region, thus helping considerably to ensure the reintegration of the repatriated persons in their communities of origin and their participation in the development process, as well as the integration of refugees who chose to stay in their host country. In that regard, the Development Programme for Displaced Persons, Refugees and Returnees (PRODERE), executed by UNDP in six countries in collaboration with UNHCR, the ILO, the Pan American Health Organization and the World Health Organization, was the most important programme carried out by CIREFCA to solve the problems of the persons concerned and to stimulate the development process. It should be stressed that all the efforts thus undertaken were accompanied by studies and measures aimed at protecting the environment. Special efforts had also been made to improve the situation of women refugees with a view to taking account of the specific requirements of women and their capacity to participate in development.

56. Despite the positive results thus achieved, the implementation of the CIREFCA Plan of Action had not made it possible to solve all the extremely complex problems that continued to arise in the region. The restoration of peace was a difficult task, but the consolidation of peace through development was a monumental undertaking requiring both a firm political will and even more resources than those which had been devoted to the problems of displaced persons during the past four years. It would therefore be necessary to assist the populations that had difficulties in exercising fully their civil, political, socio-economic and other rights, strengthen and diversify consultation processes, continue the efforts being made to protect and defend human rights, adopt new technical means of creating genuine conditions of

self-sufficiency, establish ties between local and national planning bodies and encourage United Nations agencies to strengthen their coordination and effectiveness. UNDP would clearly be the best United Nations agency capable of providing the necessary technical assistance, but human development would become a reality only through the participation of other agencies, particularly UNHCR. That was the only way in which progress would be made and definitive solutions found to the problems of displacement, social marginalization and extreme poverty. It was to be hoped that, in future, the international community and the United Nations system would support the efforts of the countries that had participated in CIREFCA with the same enthusiasm as that shown by them during the past four years.

57. Mr. LEBEDEV (Observer for the Russian Federation) said that the changes in Eastern Europe, particularly in the territory of the former Soviet Union and neighbouring regions, had given rise to vast movements of refugees which had directly affected the world migration situation, a fact that had been clearly recognized by the international community. Henceforth, Russia had to deal at the same time with the exodus phenomenon and the massive arrival of refugees. To meet all those problems, Russia, which had already acceded to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, had at the beginning of 1993 established the Federal Migration Service, a Government agency with broad powers. However, the task was complex and difficult because of the current political crisis in Russia, the lack of qualified personnel and the precarious social and economic situation in the regions where the displacements were taking place. As the Russian Federation was poorly prepared to cope with the problems of refugees, it sincerely hoped that information campaigns and training seminars would be intensified so that it would be able to comply with recognized international standards relating to refugees. It welcomed the support provided by the Office of the High Commissioner, which had enabled it to pursue its efforts in cooperation with the international community. That action should be intensified and new methods and strategies adopted, as the World Conference on Human Rights had stated, in order to address the root causes and defects of movements of refugees and other displaced persons in a coordinated manner and in cooperation with UNHCR.

58. However, it seemed that the existing international structures were not sufficient to meet the needs of refugees and displaced persons and it might therefore be necessary to consider the possibility of convening a worldwide forum that could discuss new methods and proposals in the light of the global crisis in order to fund a long-term solution to the situation that endangered the international community. To that end, account should be taken of the role and functions of UNHCR, a leading United Nations humanitarian body which was successfully fulfilling its responsibilities. However, UNHCR's mandate was rather limited because, without special authorization, it could not intervene in cases involving forcibly displaced persons, whereas the status of those persons was actually similar to that of refugees.

59. Recent developments showed that there was an obvious need to strengthen the international regime relating to refugees. His delegation was particularly concerned that some countries were beginning to adopt stricter measures in respect of asylum-seekers and were building protective walls which were in principle designed to combat xenophobia, racism and aggressive

nationalism, but which in reality amounted to a refusal to share the burden. UNHCR had to help combat the human rights violations which were the result of the mass migrations of refugees, in close cooperation with the United Nations Centre for Human Rights and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, whose post should be established as soon as possible. The United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs could play a leading role in that regard, in cooperation with UNHCR and other international humanitarian agencies, including the NGOs. UNHCR should also be encouraged to synchronize humanitarian activities with the protection and promotion of human rights during United Nations peacekeeping operations and to integrate human rights monitoring as a preventive measure in negotiations relating to the settlement of conflicts.

60. With regard to the difficult question of forcibly displaced persons, the first step could be to draft a regional convention on forcibly displaced persons for Europe containing clear criteria and defining the responsibility of United Nations bodies for the protection of persons forced to migrate within their own country. The Russian Federation expressed its appreciation to UNHCR for the assistance it had provided to help it deal with the deep and extremely dangerous crisis which it was experiencing in that field and which jeopardized the stability of neighbouring countries. The international community should be aware of the need to intensify efforts and to provide additional resources to solve the problem which existed in Russia and which placed a tremendous burden on the national economy. It was to be hoped that UNHCR would stimulate the interest which the problem was beginning to elicit on the part of world public opinion and be able to coordinate the assistance to be offered in order to finance urgent and long-term refugee aid programmes. It would also be useful to develop an efficient system of emergency humanitarian operations in order to ensure better coordination of such operations and to protect the staff who were engaged in them and whose lives were frequently threatened.

61. The Russian Federation was prepared to contribute to those humanitarian operations, to serve as an intermediary for the supply of humanitarian assistance to the newly independent States if they expressed such a wish and to provide storage facilities in its territory for resources intended for emergency situations in the region. It wanted to be able to make a useful contribution to the formulation of specific measures to be undertaken by the international community to cope with the serious impact of migration on political, economic and social stability. In that spirit of cooperation, it hoped to become a member of the Executive Committee of UNHCR.

62. Mr. MTANGO (United Republic of Tanzania) said that 1992, which was seen as the start of a decade of voluntary repatriation, had witnessed conflicts and persecution that had forced millions of persons in Bosnia, Cambodia, Liberia, Haiti and many other places to leave their homes. The international community had commendably responded adequately to appeals for assistance by refugees from Eastern Europe. It should also bear in mind the plight of refugees in other parts of the world, particularly in Africa. Angola, for example, was experiencing the world's worst humanitarian calamity, one of the "silent calamities" to which the High Commissioner had referred. Africa had taken measures to solve its problems and achieved some success in Liberia, Rwanda and Burundi, but its efforts must be supported by the allocation of

adequate resources to UNHCR programmes in those countries. In particular, it was essential for the repatriation programmes planned for Mozambique, Rwanda and Burundi to get started in 1994.

63. The success of the repatriation programmes in Africa presupposed that the international community would help rebuild the infrastructure of the countries of origin and therefore that the High Commissioner would draw up adequate plans in advance for those programmes so that the returnees' basic social amenities corresponded to those they had enjoyed while in asylum. UNHCR should also take the lead in making the development agencies fully aware of the situation so that they would fully participate in the repatriation and reintegration programmes. The High Commissioner had mentioned the possibility of a new exodus of Mozambican returnees if the necessary infrastructures were not put in place. That problem should be solved before repatriation from South Africa began, following the excellent agreement recently concluded between UNHCR and the Governments of Mozambique and South Africa. With regard to Burundi and Rwanda, each of those two countries hosted refugees from the other, and that made it necessary to view those two repatriation operations as a single integrated regional programme, ensuring a common approach applicable to both in terms of treatment and benefits and including basically the same plan of action for assistance in the host country and reintegration in the country of origin.

64. The problem of refugees in the traditional meaning of the term and that of internally displaced persons, who were considerably greater in number and whose situation was particularly serious in the third world countries, were intertwined and required a similar approach and solution. It seemed that UNHCR provided assistance to internally displaced persons under a cross-border and cross-mandate approach, but the Executive Committee should seriously consider recommending a more clearly defined mandate for the High Commissioner that would enable her to extend her role with greater confidence to the protection of displaced persons. In any event, a durable solution of the African refugee problem required that the refugees should receive basic education and vocational training, which would enable them to be self-reliant both in the host country and, subsequently, in the country of origin. The High Commissioner should also accelerate the action undertaken to revise the guidelines and policies concerning the protection of refugee women and children, make field officers more aware of the situation and establish appropriate social programmes for that vulnerable group, in very close cooperation with UNICEF and other competent agencies.

65. UNHCR's basic function centred around providing legal protection and ensuring the right of any refugee to request asylum, with a broader application of the term "protection" including physical safety and liberty. UNHCR field staff, in cooperation with the host countries concerned, should therefore stress the need to train and instruct the police, immigration and local authorities so that those basic principles were appropriately applied. The countries concerned, particularly in the developing world, could only benefit from an innovative and comprehensive approach to refugee questions. In that regard, the countries of Europe and North America were urged not to adopt arrangements that eroded internationally established principles and standards of refugee protection and would also have the effect of undermining the humanitarian function of UNHCR and the international consensus that formed

the basis of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. The Executive Committee should therefore reaffirm the importance of existing guidelines and the relevant conclusions on the protection of refugees. He expressed his appreciation to the donor community for its generosity, particularly since the countries in question were facing an economic recession, and expressed the hope that the same spirit would continue to prevail so that UNHCR could adequately fulfil its mandate. The United Republic of Tanzania, which also donated resources in kind, would continue that tradition and assured the High Commissioner of its constant support.

66. Mr. ZAHKAN (Observer for Egypt) commended UNHCR on the considerable efforts it was making to provide protection and assistance to refugees and displaced persons, in particular to those who formed the largest and most vulnerable segment, namely, women and children. The problem of refugees and displaced persons, which continued to grow in scope, should be addressed in a humanitarian manner, since the fundamental principles relating to human rights were universal standards binding on all peoples, nations, societies and individuals. The problem should also be approached in all its aspects, including the causes of the phenomenon and the means to prevent its appearance. The constant numerical and geographical extension of that problem and the deterioration of the situation of those who were its victims were matters of considerable concern. The forms it took in Africa and in the former Yugoslavia also indicated changes and new challenges which made it necessary for the international community to improve its methods and programmes for the protection of refugees and displaced persons with a view to adapting them to new situations.

67. He stressed that reciprocal and close cooperation and coordination had to be established between the various United Nations agencies with a view to increasing the effectiveness of their activities in the field of preventive action and eliminating the causes of refugee flows, on the one hand, and between the international and regional organizations operating in that area, on the other. His delegation welcomed the close cooperation that existed between UNHCR's Regional Bureau in Cairo and the Egyptian Government and other Governments in the region, as well as between the various bodies carrying out humanitarian activities in the Egyptian capital. It also pointed out that, at the 29th Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity, held in June 1993 in Egypt, a mechanism for the prevention and settlement of conflicts in the continent had been created which could help solve the problem by dealing with its causes. In respect of prevention, there was also a need for cooperation between UNHCR and the Centre for Human Rights in monitoring human rights violations to prevent them from becoming more serious. The dramatic events in the former Yugoslavia confirmed the need to assign absolute priority to relief and humanitarian assistance and to measures that would enable UNHCR and the other competent bodies to carry out their mission. The events in Somalia and Liberia, like those in the former Yugoslavia, also confirmed the need to ensure the protection of the staff entrusted with that mission.

68. On the African continent, refugees numbered about 6 million, i.e. one third of all the refugees in the world, and displaced persons numbered 15 million. That situation, which was continually deteriorating, was the

cause of considerable human, material and moral losses and hampered the development of countries already facing many other difficulties. Hence the need to coordinate the action of all agencies involved in humanitarian relief at the international, regional and local levels. In that connection, Egypt congratulated UNHCR on the agreement concluded with South Africa and Mozambique.

69. Egypt expressed its great appreciation of the efforts made by ICRC and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to ensure the protection of refugees and displaced persons in situations of armed conflict. It also appreciated the praiseworthy work done by the International Institute of Humanitarian Law to develop and disseminate international law relating to refugees and their protection and international humanitarian law through the various seminars and round tables which it organized and in which diplomats from various regions of the world and representatives of non-governmental organizations also took part. That action, in which UNHCR collaborated, had been quite fruitful and many of the recommendations made in that framework had subsequently been adopted by the Executive Committee. The round table on humanitarian law in situations of armed conflict had demonstrated the importance of a frank and open dialogue on burning humanitarian problems and the courses organized by the Institute for Government officials and representatives of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies had made a substantial contribution to the improvement of humanitarian action and its adaptation to the changes taking place at the international level. In view of those changes and those new challenges, the international community had a duty to be more resolute and interdependent in its action, both preventive and curative.

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.